

Mary's Entrance into the Temple and her Offering

Zachary and the other men had already gone to the Temple, and now Mary was led thither by the women and the virgins. Anne and her elder daughter Mary Heli, with the little daughter of the latter, Mary Cleophas, walked first; then came Mary in her second suit, the sky-blue dress and mantle, her neck and arms adorned with garlands, and the flower wreathed candlestick in her hand. On either side walked three little maidens with similarly trimmed candlesticks. They were dressed in white



embroidered with gold, and wore bluish mantles. They were quite covered with garlands, even their arms were twined with flowers. Then followed the other virgins and little girls, about twenty in number, all dressed beautifully, but somewhat differently though all wore mantles. Then came the elderly females. They could not proceed straight to the Temple from this point; they had to take a circuitous route of nearly half an hour. They passed through some streets and before Veronica's house. From many of the dwellings the procession was saluted, the spectators gazing in wonder at the child and her beautiful train of attendants. There was something very extraordinary in Mary's appearance. At the Temple, men were busy opening a large and wonderfully beautiful gate upon which were carved grapevines, ears of wheat, and heads of various kinds. It was the Golden Gate. The priests led the Holy Virgin up numerous steps to this gate. Joachim and Zachary met them at the gate, which opened into a long archway, and led them through several passages into a hall. Here Mary was again questioned by the priests, after which she was clothed in the third holiday suit, the violet-blue, embroidered one.

And now Joachim went with the priests to offer sacrifice. He took fire from a certain place and stood between two priests at the altar. The approach to the altar from three sides was free, but not so on the fourth. At the four corners of the altar, stood small copper pillars and a pipe of the same metal, shaped like a large inverted funnel, which ended in a spiral tube. By this arrangement the smoke from the burning sacrifice rose and escaped over the head of the priest. On three sides of the altar a shelf could be drawn out to receive what was to be laid on the middle of it, since to reach that far would be impossible.

When the sacrifice was kindled, Mary went with the women and children to her place of prayer in the women's porch, where she and her young companions stood in the front row. The porch was separated from the court of the altar of burnt offerings by a wall, in which was a gate with a grating above. Through this gate Joachim entered the subterranean passage when, upon the day of Mary's Immaculate Conception, he met Anne under the Golden Gate. The women back in the court could see the altar better, when mounted on steps raised in tiers. In another court was standing a crowd of white-robed boys belonging to the Temple, playing upon flutes and harps. After the sacrifice, a portable altar was set up under the arched gateway, and before it were placed a couple of steps. Zachary and Joachim, with some priests and two Levites, entered from the court of the altar of burnt offerings, carrying rolls and writing materials, while Anne led Mary to the steps before the altar. Mary knelt upon the steps, while Joachim and Anne, laying their hands on her head, uttered some words bearing reference to the offering of their child, which words were written down by the two Levites. Then one of the priests cut a lock of hair from the child's head, and cast it upon a pan of live coals, after which he threw around her a brown veil. During this ceremony, the girls sang 44, the priests, 49, and the boys played on their musical instruments.

And now the priests led the Holy Virgin up a long flight of steps in the wall that separated the sanctuary from the rest of the Temple. They stood her in something like a niche, from which she could see into the Temple where were ranged numbers of men who seemed to be consecrated to its service. Two priests stood at Mary's side, and several others on the steps praying and reading aloud from rolls. Behind Mary and on the other side of the wall, a priest was standing at the altar of incense, only half of his person visible from the point at which Mary and her attendants were placed. Through an opening contrived for the purpose, one could cast incense upon the altar without entering the court. The priest now at the incense altar was a holy old man. While he offered sacrifice and the cloud of incense arose around Mary, I saw a vision, which grew in magnitude until at last it filled the whole Temple and obscured it.

I saw above the head of Mary the glory and the Mystery of the Ark of the Covenant. At first it looked exactly like the Ark of the Covenant; and lastly like the Temple itself. Out of the Mystery and before Mary's breast, arose a chalice similar to that of the Last Supper; above it and just in front of her mouth appeared bread marked with a cross. Beams of light radiated around her, and in them shone her various types and symbols. The mysterious pictures of the Litany of Loretto and the other names and titles of Mary, I

saw ranged up the whole flight of steps and around her.

From her shoulders, right and left, stretched an olive and a cedar branch crosswise above an elegant palm tree with a small tuft of leaves that stood directly behind her. In the intervening spaces of this verdant cross, appeared all the instruments of Christ's Passion. Over the vision hovered the Holy Spirit, a figure winged with glory, in appearance more human than dovelike.

The heavens opened above Mary and the central point of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the City of God, floated over her with all the gardens, the palaces, and the dwellings of the future saints. Angels in myriads hovered around, and the glory that encircled her was full of angelic faces.

Ah, who can express it! Infinite variety, unceasing change, all these pictures following quickly upon and, as it were, growing out of one another.

Innumerable points of this vision, I have forgotten. All the splendor and magnificence of the Temple, the richly ornamented wall before which Mary was standing—all grew dark and somber. The whole Temple disappeared, for Mary and her glory alone was visible.

In this vision, symbolical of Mary's spiritual signification, I saw her not as a child, but full-grown. She hovered in the air. And through and through the vision, I still saw the priests, the incense offering, and everything else. Then the priest at the altar appeared to prophesy, and to call upon the people to thank God and to pray, for that great things were to come upon the child.

The crowd in the Temple, greatly awed—although they had not seen the vision that I saw—maintained a solemn stillness. The vision faded away just as gradually as it had unfolded. At last, the Mystery of the Ark of the Covenant shone again in its glory over her heart, and the child once more stood there alone in her rich attire.

Then the priests, among whom Zachary was one of those standing on the lower steps, led Mary down by the hand. One of them took the light from her and the little garlands off her arms, and handed them to the other girls. Mary was then led through a door into another hall where six other Temple virgins, their mistress Noemi, (who was the sister of Lazarus's mother) Anna, and another female met them and scattered flowers before her. To them the priest delivered the child.

When the singing was ended, Mary took leave of her parents. Joachim was especially affected. He took the little child up in his arms, pressed her to his heart, and said weeping: "Remember my soul before God."

Mary now accompanied the women and children belonging to the Temple to their dwelling on the north side, from which passages and winding stairs led up to little chambers adjoining the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies, where they went to pray. The others (that is, Mary's relatives and friends) returned

to the apartments near the entrance, and took a repast with the priests, the women apart. There were still in the Temple some devout adorers. Many had followed the procession to the entrance. There were numbers among those present who knew that Mary was a child of promise in her family. I remember, though not distinctly, that Anne had dropped some such expressions to her friends as: "Now does the vessel of the Promise enter the Temple. Now is the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple." It was by a special manifestation of the Divine Will that this feast was so solemnly and magnificently celebrated.

Joachim and Anne were indeed wealthy, but they lived very frugally. They gave all to the Temple and to the poor. I do not now remember how long it was that Anne took for herself nothing but cold victuals, but she treated her domestics generously and provided them with dowries. I think she and Joachim returned that same day with their whole company to Bethoron. I saw also a feast among the Temple children. They had a meal at which Mary had to question first the mistresses and then the maidens separately as to whether they were willing to have her among them. This was the custom.

Then the girls had a dance among themselves. They stood two and two opposite one another and danced, changed places across, and formed figures in and out. There was no leaping, but certain swaying movements of the whole person, which seemed somewhat expressive of the Jewish character. Some of the girls accompanied the dance with the music of flutes, triangles, chimes, and an instrument that gave forth sounds at once strange and agreeable. It consisted of a little box with oblique sides, over which were stretched strings which the players touched with their fingers. The center of the box contained bellows out of which projected several pipes, some crooked, others straight. The performer pressed sometimes here, sometimes there on the center of the bellows which mingled its sounds with those of the strings. The instrument was rested either upon the knee of the performer, or upon a stool under which the knee was placed. In the evening, Noemi took Mary to her cell, from which she could see down into the Temple. Here Mary mentioned to Noemi her desire to get up more frequently in the night to pray, but Noemi refused her request for the present. The women belonging to the Temple wore white robes, long and wide, girdled at the waist. Their flowing sleeves were turned up when at work.

Far back in the Temple were numerous chambers built in the wall and connected with the dwellings of the women. Mary's cell was one of the most distant, one nearest the Holy of Holies. From the passage that led to it, one raised a curtain and stepped into an apartment, a sort of antechamber separated from the cell by a light, semicircular, movable screen. Here in the

corners right and left, were shelves for clothing and other things. Opposite the door in the screen that led into the cell was an opening hung with gauze and tapestry, and looking down into the Temple. It was rather high in the wall; one had to mount upon steps to reach it. On the left of the cell, lay a cover rolled into a bundle, which Mary unrolled at night for a couch. A branched lamp stood in a niche of the wall. I saw the holy child standing on a stool near it and praying out of a roll with red knobs on the rod. It was indeed a touching sight. The child wore a little coarsely woven, striped dress, blue and white, with yellow flowers. A small round table like a stool stood in the room, and on it I saw Anna setting a dish of fruit the size of beans, and a little jug. The child was skillful far beyond her years. She could already work on little white cloths for the service of the Temple. The wall of her cell was inlaid with colored, triangular stones.

I often saw the child Mary seized with holy longing for the Messiah and saying to Anna: "Oh, will the promised Child be born soon? Oh, if I could only see that Child! Oh, if only I am living when He is born!" Then Anna would give this reply: "Think how old I am and how long I have waited for that Child! And you—you are still so young!" And Mary would shed tears of longing for the promised Saviour.

The maidens reared in the Temple under the care of the matrons occupied themselves with embroidery, with all kinds of ornamental work, and with cleansing the priestly garments and the vessels belonging to the Temple. From their cells, they could see into the Temple, pray and meditate. They were, by the fact of their parents' having placed them there, entirely dedicated to the Lord. Upon reaching a certain age, they were given in marriage, for there was among the more enlightened Israelites the pious, though secret hope that from such a virgin dedicated to God, the Messiah would be born.

I never saw that Herod built the Temple anew. Under him there were indeed many changes made in it; but at the time of Mary's entrance, eleven years before the Birth of Christ, the Temple itself had not been touched. The additions and changes had been made as heretofore on the outbuildings alone.